

**THE
APPRECIATION
OF POETRY**

The
Appreciation of Poetry
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The Appreciation of Poetry

TERSE definitions of the term poetry afford little help towards the understanding of our appreciation of the division of literature which passes by that general name. Matthew Arnold, for example, whose fame as critic was no less widely established than his repute as poet, does not take us far with his simple assurance that poetry is "criticism of life." Another contemporary poet, Alfred Austin, tells us that "poetry is an imaginative representation, in verse or rhythm, of whatever men perceive, feel, think, or do." Yet another critic, Edmund Gurney, in two essays, respectively entitled *Poets, Critics, and Class-lists*, and *The Appreciation of Poetry*, lays stress upon what he terms "the non-reasonable element of poetry" as a factor in appreciation, and deplores "the almost universal habit of those who treat of this element at all . . . to treat of it as having only one constituent and to identify it with the purely *musical* or *sensory* element in verse." In the first-named essay Gurney well shows how futile are the current

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disputes about the superexcellence of this poet or that ; how mistaken are the critics who insist on arranging our poets in "class-lists," adding : " My own experience is that I hardly ever strongly differ from the remarks that I encounter about poetry of any degree of admitted excellence, except in so far as they set up or imply comparisons." With amusing forgetfulness he infringes his own canon in the second essay by declaring that " a person who is more interested in some vigorous abortion of Mr Walt Whitman's than in Mr Swinburne's *Garden of Proserpine* may easily fail to see where Shelley is superior to Byron." The class-list with a vengeance ! Surely the tasteful reader should have neither favourite poets nor unfavourite. To the limit of his ability he must be catholic in admiration and in criticism. But Gurney's frank depreciation of Whitman shows finely how one's sense of artistic values is restricted within the limits imposed by the " criticism of life " characteristic of one's generation and of personal temperament. That which Watts, Wagner, and Whitman suffered at the hands of our fathers, many whom our children will recognise as artists of supreme worth may be suffering, must be suffering, at our own hands to-day. " The education of

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the judgment," says Faraday, "has for its first and last step—humility."

In all humility, then, we would suggest that the essential elements in the appreciation of poetry are threefold. There is, first of all, the pure appeal to the ear, the appeal made by rhythm, by cadence, and by rhyme. Secondly, there is the appeal to the sensual imagination. Since for the fully equipped human mind the fundamental sense is sight, we find that in poetry the visual appeal is predominant. An analysis of the poetry preferred by those who have been blind from birth would probably show that in them there is greater interest in auditory images than is usual in sighted persons. The dog's imagination must move in a world of smells, and if we could conceive a dog's intelligence enhanced to a degree rendering artistic appreciation possible, there can be little doubt that the favourite poetry of the canine race would be that which dwelt on the delights of the olfactory imagination! All the senses play their part in this sensual appeal. It is unphilosophical to introduce a priori moral judgments here, or to regard any one of the senses as "higher" than the rest. Has not Keats, least fleshly of poets, in one of the most spiritual of his poems,

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immortalised the evening odours of that charmed season when spring is yielding place to summer ?

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket and the fruit-tree wild ;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine ;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves ;
And Mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

But, as our examples will show, visual images predominate in poetry ; next come auditory, while, since touch is pre-eminently love's sense, in love poetry tactile images play a leading part, and even so discreetly Victorian a poet as Tennyson does not hesitate to make the impassioned lover exclaim :

O that 'twere possible
After long years of pain
To find the arms of my true love
Round me once again !

When I was wont to meet her
In the silent woody places
By the home that gave me birth,
We stood tranced in long embraces
Mixt with kisses sweeter sweeter
Than anything on earth.

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Lastly, we have the appeal to the intelligence; this element, in so far as separable in analysis, being obviously one of purely rational appreciation, whereas the second appeal (that to the sensual imagination) is transitional between the non-reasonable or exclusively emotional element of sound, and the purely rational element in which appreciation depends on the understanding.

As with all classifications that concern the world of organic life, the boundaries are ill-defined, the types merge into one another at the edges. The intellectual appeal, for example, though we have spoken of it as "purely rational" to emphasise the contrast with the appeal that is "exclusively emotional," is in reality an appeal to the intellectual *imagination*, and is emotionally tinged. The peculiar thrill which great poetry produces, dependent as it often is on a mainly intellectual appeal, and accompanied as it is by a sense of liberation from the bonds of time and space, is by no means an experience that translates us to the sphere of the pure reason in the philosophic sense. An appeal to the reason, which is nothing more, hardly deserves the name of a poem. Writing of Lucretius' *De Rerum Naturâ*, H. S. Salt says: "This work is a standing

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disproof of the assertion that great poetry cannot be didactic or cannot be directly so." Lucretius has been termed "the poet's poet" and "a poet of all lovers of the human." To us, Lucretius' work, despite its metrical form, seems a great philosophical treatise rather than a great poem, and not even Salt's fine translation can induce us to admire the word-form as much as we admire the thought-content and the imagery of the following passage :

So see we that our bodily wants are small,
Freedom from pain, and Nature's simple bliss,
To strew our life with luxuries manifold ;
Nor craves the heart for purer joy than this :
Albeit no gilded statues line the hall,
And flaming torches in their hands uphold
To illuminate the midnight festival ;
Nor shines the house with silver and with gold,
Nor fretted ceilings to the harp resound ;
Nay, but at ease beneath some spreading tree,
Where through soft sward a stream goes murmuring,
We sit and feast with sweet frugality,
What time the fair skies smile on us, and Spring
Hath starred with flowerets all the glittering ground.

Yet assuredly great poetry can be didactic—or didactic poetry can be great. Are not Omar's quatrains didactic ? Contrast the Persian's treatment of the same theme :

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- With me along some Strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown,
Where name of Slave and Sultan scarce is known,
And pity Sultan Mahmud on his throne.

Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.

Wherein lies the difference? In part, doubtless, in the “unreasonable element,” in the exquisite melody of the Fitzgerald-Omar versification; in part, perhaps, in the conciseness of philosophic exposition in a poem of a hundred odd stanzas as compared with a didactic treatise running into many thousand hexameters; but the personal element (the most unreasonable of all) in artistic appreciation, remains. To us Fitzgerald-Omar makes a strong personal appeal, whereas *quâ* poet, Lucretius makes very little. *Quâ* philosopher Lucretius was as unique in his age and nation as was Omar in the Persia of eight hundred years ago. But can justice be done to any poet in a translation? Fitzgerald’s *Omar* is at once something greater and something less—a poem, not a translation. To appreciate Lucretius as poet we must turn to the original, for in the Latin alone can we enjoy the rare conjuncture of melody,

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thought, and visual imagery displayed in the following passage :

. . . sic rerum summa novatur
semper, et inter se mortales mutua vivunt.
augescunt aliae gentes, aliae minuuntur
inque brevi spatio mutantur saecula animantum
et quasi cursores vitae lampada tradunt.

To return to our analysis. No poet can be classified as making an appeal of one sole kind, for in any individual poet the appeal, in one or in two of the three kinds usually predominates ; and the reader's preference for this poet or for that is largely determined by subjective characteristics—and by age. The child, in years or in experience, is pleased by mere jingles of the “ My dame has a lame tame crane ” and “ Simple Simon met a pieman ” order. Similarly, in the field of religious life, since religion appeals so largely to the child in man, extensive use is made of jingles, as in the mantras of the Eastern or the litanies of the Western world. Almost exclusively these stimulate the sound-sense, for they contain but little to awaken the sensual imagination, while whatever intellectual content some of them at first possess is speedily dissipated by unending mechanical repetition, until the pleasure they give is on a

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level little higher than that felt by a savage beating a tom-tom or by a child rattling a stick along a railing. As intelligence develops, the appeal to the sensual imagination is increasingly felt. At a still later stage of individual and racial growth comes that appeal to the understanding which is characteristic of the most highly developed poetry. But it must not be supposed that this age-sequence in the appreciation of poetry is always rigidly followed. Some persons seem constitutionally lacking in the sound-sense for language, just as others lack what is termed a musical "ear" (these two deficiencies of faculty are by no means necessarily associated); and in such persons there may arise a belated appreciation of the sensual or intellectual imaginative element, with very little regard for form. Many, again, may be defective in the visualising or other sensual imaginative faculty, while enjoying to the full the sound and the intellectual content of poetry. In yet others it would seem that the appeal to the imaginative understanding never comes into play. They read poetry for its sound and for the sensual images it evokes; its esoteric meaning eludes them.

When we come to apply critical principles

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to poetry that has passed beyond the stage of mere jingle, we find that writers generally recognised as poets appeal at least to the visual imagination as well as to the sound-sense; and we find that in the case of the typical "popular" poets, those making a very wide appeal, there is usually displayed a strongly developed visual imagination and a characteristically able, by no means unpleasing, "jingly" form. For most members of the English-speaking kinship the faculty, of poetic appreciation, when it gets beyond the "Simple Simon" stage, is nowadays trained in the school of one or more of the three masters of somewhat primitive verse-making: Scott, Macaulay, and Longfellow. Is there any among lovers of poetry who has not been thrilled, who fails even now to be thrilled, by the opening stanzas of *The Lady of the Lake*?

The stag at eve had drunk his fill,
Where danced the moon on Monan's rill,
And deep his midnight lair had made
In lone Glenartney's hazel shade;
But, when the sun his beacon red
Had kindled on Benvoirlich's head,
The deep-mouth'd bloodhound's heavy bay
Resounded up the rocky way,
And faint, from farther distance borne,
Were heard the clanging hoof and horn.

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As Chief, who hears his warder call,
"To arms ! The foemen storm the wall,"
The antler'd monarch of the waste
Sprung from his heathery couch in haste.
But, ere his fleet career he took,
The dew-drops from his flanks he shook ;
Like crested leader proud and high,
Toss'd his beam'd frontlet to the sky,
A moment gazed adown the dale,
A moment snuff'd the tainted gale,
A moment listen'd to the cry,
That thicken'd as the chase drew nigh ;
Then, as the headmost foes appear'd,
With one brave bound the copse he clear'd,
And, stretching forward free and far,
Sought the wild heaths of Uam-Var.

The chase passes "like a hurricane," and then :

Faint and more faint, its failing din
Return'd from cavern, cliff, and linn,
And silence settled, wide and still,
On the lone wood and mighty hill.

Who has not at one time been fired by *The Lays of Ancient Rome* ? Who can fail to be moved by Macaulay's word-pictures of what happened long ago when Porsena of Clusium was on the march to Rome ?

The horsemen and the footmen
Are pouring in amain
From many a stately market-place,
From many a fruitful plain ;

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From many a lonely hamlet,
Which, hid by beech and pine,
Like an eagle's nest, hangs on the crest
Of purple Apennine.

Tall are the oaks whose acorns
Drop in dark Auser's rill ;
Fat are the stags that champ the boughs
Of the Ciminian hill ;
Beyond all streams Clitumnus
Is to the herdsman dear ;
Best of all pools the fowler loves
The great Volsinian mere.

But now no stroke of woodman
Is heard by Auser's rill ;
No hunter tracks the stag's green path
Up the Ciminian hill ;
Unwatched along Clitumnus
Grazes the milk-white steer ;
Unharm'd the water-fowl may dip
In the Volsinian mere.

The harvests of Arretium,
This year, old men shall reap ;
This year, young boys in Umbro
Shall plunge the struggling sheep ;
And in the vats of Luna,
This year, the must shall foam
Round the white feet of laughing girls
Whose sires have marched to Rome.

To come to the work of a living poet, we
find precisely the same kind of appeal in

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Kipling's *The Ballad of East and West*. The colonel's son is pursuing the border brigand, in a setting reminiscent of that which in *The Lady of the Lake* leads up to the duel between FitzJames and Roderick Dhu :

• There was rock to the left and rock to the right, and low lean thorn between,

And thrice he heard a breech-bolt snick tho' never-a man was seen.

They have ridden the low moon out of the sky, their hoofs drum up the dawn,

The dun he went like a wounded bull, but the mare like a new-roused fawn.

The dun he fell at a water-course—in a woful heap fell he,

And Kamal has turned the red mare back, and pulled the rider free.

He has knocked the pistol out of his hand—small room was there to strive,

“’Twas only by favour of mine,” quoth he, “ye rode so long alive :

There was not a rock for twenty mile, there was not a clump of tree,

But covered a man of my own men with his rifle cocked on his knee.

If I had raised my bridle-hand, as I have held it low,

The little jackals that flee so fast were feasting all in a row :

If I had bowed my head on my breast, as I have held it high,

The kite that whistles above us now were gorged till she could not fly.”

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Almost exclusively visual is the imagery employed by Rossetti, a lover of sweet sounds, with a fondness for the archaic device of the refrain—a poet who, like Scott and Macaulay, makes little claim upon the reflective intelligence. In *Sister Helen*, for example, the “little brother” has been watching his spell-weaving sister at work while she made a waxen image and set it to waste away by the fire. He asks :

“Why did you melt your waxen man, ‘
Sister Helen ?

To-day is the third since you began.”

“The time was long, yet the time ran,
Little brother.”

(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
Three days to-day, between Hell and Heaven !*)

The little brother goes out on to the balcony and describes, for his sister within, how the two brethren and the father of the bewitched and dying man, Sister Helen’s sometime lover, ride up one after the other to beseech her mercy. Last of all comes the wife. With the little brother’s eyes we see them sue in vain. They ride away in hopeless silence, for the waxen man has perished, and there-with the tortured soul passes, flitting on its way by the dwelling of the once-loved woman:

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“ Ah ! what white thing at the door has cross'd,
Sister Helen ?

Ah ! what is this that sighs in the frost ? ”

“ A soul that's lost as mine is lost,

Little brother ! ”

(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*

Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven !)

Rossetti's own view of this poem is interesting. “ What,” he asks, “ what more inspiring for poetic effort than the terrible Love turned to Hate—perhaps the deadliest of all passion-woven complexities—which is the theme of *Sister Helen*, and, in a more fantastic form, of *Eden Bower*—the surroundings of both poems being the mere machinery of a central universal meaning ? ” We should contend, rather, that *Sister Helen* is almost void of thought, that it contains little more than pictures—but pictures interpenetrated with the magic of sound. Similarly in the best-known of Rossetti's poems, *The Blessed Damozel*,* the claim on the understanding is so slight as almost to excuse Nordau's fierce criticism of the work, a criticism based upon his own lack of sound-sense and his own failure to feel the charm of the visual images. An earlier critic had emptied the vials of his wrath upon what he termed “ the fleshly school of poetry.” Yet who that is endowed

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with a sensuous imagination and a poetic ear can fail to enjoy the lilt of this poem or to sympathise with the ache in the senses of the bereaved lover who contemplates in imagination how:

The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of heaven,
And still she bowed herself and stooped
Out of the circling charm,
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm

Perhaps it is as the writer of the sonnet sequence, *The House of Life*, that Rossetti reaches his most perfect mastery of expression; and here, moreover, he is far more thoughtful. Consider, for example, *Silent Noon*:

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,—
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms;
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms,
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
All round our nest far as the eye can pass
Are golden kingcup fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn hedge.
'Tis visible silence still as the hour-glass.

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Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky :—
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.
Oh ! clasp we to our heart for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love.

But even while admiring Rossetti, especially Rossetti, as here, at his best, we turn with relief from this mellifluous sonnet to verse of stronger mould, verse which, though far rougher in form, compels us to think. Such verse, poetry in Arnold's sense, instinct with criticism of life, as the following :

The Sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited
that good part ;
But the Sons of Martha favour their mother, of the careful
soul and troubled heart.
And because she lost her temper once, and because she
was rude to the Lord her guest,
Her Sons must wait upon Mary's Sons, world without
end, reprieve, or rest.

It is their care in all the ages, to take the buffet and
cushion the shock ;
It is their care that the gear engages ; it is their care
that the switches lock.
It is their care that the wheels run truly ; it is their care
to embark and entrain,
Tally, transport, and deliver duly, the Sons of Mary by
land and main.

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They finger Death at their glove's end, when they piece
and repiece the living wires ;

He rears against the gates they tend ; they feed him,
hungry, behind their fires.

Early at dawn, ere men see clear, they stumble into his
terrible stall,

And hale him forth like a haltered steer, and goad him
and turn him till evenfall.

They do not preach that their God will rouse them a
little before the nuts work loose ;

They do not teach that his pity allows them to leave their
work whenever they choose.

As in the thronged and lighted ways, so in the dark and
the desert they stand,

Wary and watchful all their days, that their brethren's
days may be long in the land.

Lift ye the stone or cleave the wood, to make a path
more fair or flat,

Lo ! It is black already with blood some Son of Martha
spilled for that.

Not as a ladder from earth to heaven, not as an altar to
any creed ;

But simple service, simply given, for his own kind in its
common need.

And the Sons of Mary smile and are blessed—for they
know that the Angels are on their side.

They know that in them is the Grace confessed, and for
them are the Mercies multiplied.

They sit at the Feet and they hear the Word—they know
how truly the promise runs ;

They have laid their burden upon the Lord, and—the
Lord, He lays it on Martha's Sons.

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The introduction of these extracts from a poem which interests chiefly through the thoughts it conveys, through its criticism of life, has been a digression. From Rossetti the natural transition is rather to another mid-Victorian poet whose charm is so largely dependent on melody—Swinburne. Of this writer it has been said: "Much of Swinburne is enjoyable from the sheer music of the words, without regard to their meaning." In fact Swinburne himself maintains that the sound *is* the sense. Surely this is an exaggeration? Can we not find a reason why those love Swinburne who have ceased to be greatly pleased by the simple strains of "Ding-dong bell, pussy's in the well"? Truly Swinburne is one of the masters of English sound, but at times, even to his admirers, it seems that there is more sound than sense. Consequently he is not difficult to parody; but those with sufficient poetic faculty to succeed as parodists can hardly fail to understand the secrets of Swinburne's strength as well as those of his weakness, to appreciate the poet's appeal to the visual imagination and his power in the field of imaginative thought. Once more, when we refer to visual imagination, we use the term merely to simplify the argument, and because

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(except in the case of the blind) the human sensual imagination is predominantly visual. But Swinburne has a keen love of sounds also, and reproduces them in the magic of his verse. Especially does he love images suggested by and recalling the various tones of wind and sea, as again and again in *Iseult at Tintagel*, in passages almost orchestral in their effect :

And swordlike was the sound of the iron wind,
And as a breaking battle was the sea

And as a full field charging was the sea,
And as the cry of slain men was the wind.

And all their past came wailing in the wind,
And all their future thundered in the sea.

How magnificent is the imagery throughout *By the North Sea*, as in the apostrophe to the rising sun :

The hills and the sands and the beeches,
The waters adrift and afar,
The banks and the creeks and the reaches,
How glad of thee all these are !
The flowers, overflowing, overcrowded,
Are drunk with the mad wind's mirth :
The delight of thy coming unclouded
Makes music of earth.

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Yet it is not solely through the charm which he exercises on the ear, nor yet through this in conjunction with his vivid imagery, that Swinburne has become one of the favourite poets of revolutionary thinkers. In his appeal to the intelligence he is a more comprehensive poet than any of those hitherto named. Take his presentation of pantheism in *Hertha* :

Beside or above me
Nought is there to go ;
Love or unlove me,
Unknow me or know,
I am that which unloves me and loves ; I am stricken
and I am the blow.

I the mark that is missed
And the arrows that miss,
I the mouth that is kissed
And the breath in the kiss,
The search, and the sought, and the secker, the soul and
the body that is.

Compare (in passing, and with no thought of a "class-list") Emerson's exposition of the same idea in *Brahma* :

• If the red slayer think he slays,
 Or if the slain think he is slain,
* They know not well the subtle ways
 I keep and pass and turn again.

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They reckon ill who leave me out ;
When me they fly I am the wings ;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahman sings.

And return to consider some of the later stanzas of *Hertha*, and to understand why, when the author of *In Memoriam* died, the laureateship was not offered to the writer of *Songs Before Sunrise* :

God thunders in heaven, and his angels are red with the
wrath of the Lord.

God trembles in heaven, and his angels are white with
the terror of God.

For his twilight is come on him,
His anguish is here,
And his spirits gaze dumb on him,
Grown grey from his fear ;
And his hour taketh hold on him stricken, the last of his
infinite year.

Thought made him and breaks him,
Truth slays and forgives ;
But to you, as time takes him,
This new thing it gives.
Even love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon freedom
and lives.

For one more example let us recall Swinburne's stanzas concerning the war of 1870 :

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Though France were given for prey to bird and beast,
Though Rome were rent in twain of king and priest,
The soul of man, the soul is safe at least
That gives death life and dead men hands to smite

Are ye so strong, O kings, O strong men? Nay,
Waste all ye will and scatter all ye may,
Yet one thing is there that ye shall not slay,
Even thought, that fire nor iron can affright.

The woundless and invisible thought that goes
Free throughout time as north or south wind blows,
Far throughout space as east or west sea flows,
And all dark things before it are made bright.

It is the thought-content of these lines which moves us, far more than the fine sound of the words in which it is conveyed. The setting must be adequate to the thought, or the poetic appeal fails. But the setting need not be metrical, need not be verbal at all. Those familiar with Rodin's statue of *Le Penseur*, the brooding figure of the thinker seated in front of the Pantheon in Paris, will recognise that the meaning of the sculptor is identical with that of the poet, identical also with that conveyed in prose by Olive Schreiner in one of the most beautiful of her *Dreams*—the supremacy of thought over force, that supremacy without which life would seem to be but "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound

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and fury, signifying nothing.” In a cartoon published not long ago in a New York monthly, *The Masses*, the above-quoted lines by Swinburne were printed beneath a drawing recalling Rodin’s *Le Penseur*. Six months or so later, in the New York *Vorwaerts*, appeared a short poem, *The Unconquered*, signed Ludwig Pfau, which in our view was suggested by *The Masses*’ cartoon. An English rendering may be attempted :

Unconquered fighters whom no fear appals,
Firm as a rock they stand, with shining shield,
In serried ranks, arms fixed, nor ever yield,
Scorning your lances and your musket balls

Without a ladder, see, they storm your walls,
Undaunted rise from every stricken field,
For from life’s very source their hurts are healed :
At their advance the rival army falls.

Your strongholds now they enter all unknown,
Your lion’s claws cut lest more ill be wrought,
Your eagle’s talons pare. Where’er their scutcheon’s
brought,

The temples totter ; kings are overthrown
Where rings their war-cry. If their name be sought,
These matchless fighters, lo ! their name is Thought.

So runs thought round the world, in the
magnificent stanzas of Swinburne, in the

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massive bronze of Rodin, in Olive Schreiner's inspired prose, in the pencilled figure of *The Masses'* cartoonist, in Pfau's German verses, and in our own halting translation. It is the idea that counts, far more than the form. To quote Keats :

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on,
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone !

• • Browning offers an interesting example of the varied characteristics of the poetic appeal. Mainly he rouses the intellectual imagination ; but he is endowed with a strong visualising faculty, and thrills us at times with rare lyrical outbursts, as in Mertoun's song in *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon* :

And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on depth
of lustre
Hid i' the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier than the
wild-grape cluster,
Gush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted
marble :
Then her voice's music . . . call it the well's bubbling,
the bird's warble !
And this woman says, " My days were sunless and my
nights were moonless,
Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's
heart's outbreak tuneless,
If you loved me not ! "

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But the typical Browning is the writer of *The Ring and the Book*, the artist in words who desires to make his readers see the world as he sees it, or rather think the world as he thinks it, a theist's world, created by God as the laboratory in which man's fashioning is to be completed. It is the poet himself who speaks to us through the mouth of the Pope, letting his reason play around the moral enigma of a world which, in his creed, is made by a Being at once all-good and all-powerful :

The work i' the world, not man's but God's ; leave man !
Conjecture of the worker by the work ;
Is there strength there ?—enough : intelligence ?
Ample : but goodness in a like degree ?
Not to the human eye in the present state,
An isoscele deficient at the base.
What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God
But just the instance which this tale supplies
Of love without a limit ? So is strength,
So is intelligence ; let love be so,
Unlimited in its self-sacrifice,
Then is the tale true and God shows complete.
Beyond the tale I reach into the dark,
Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands :
I can believe this dread machinery
Of sin and sorrow would confound me else,
Devised—all pain, at most expenditure
Of pain by Who devised pain,—to evolve,
By new machinery in counterpart,

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The moral qualities of man—how else?—
To make him love in turn and be beloved,
Creative and self-sacrificing too,
And thus eventually God-like, (ay,
“I have said ye are Gods,”—shall it be said for nought?)
Enable man to wring from out all pain,
All pleasure for a common heritage
To all eternity.

Browning's Pope was—Browning. This reveals to us a factor of delight in poetry which many critics have discerned. The poet's readers become the intimates of a mind of rare powers. Though Byron's poetic fame in Germany may puzzle us, we recognise a fine flash of insight in Treitschke's dictum: “All his works breathe that charm of personal experience to which poetry owes its power. He was what he wrote.” Admirably is this idea phrased by a contemporary critic. “Alpha of the Plough” writes: “Most of us are doomed to go through life without communicating the mysteries of our experience.

Alas for those who never sing,
But die with all their music in them.

It is the privilege of the artist in any medium to enrich the general life with the consciousness of the world that he alone has experienced. He gives us new kingdoms for our inheritance, makes us the sharers of his

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visions, opens out wider horizons, and floods our life with richer glories.”

The pantheist and the theist have both been heard. Let the atheist now speak, if only to show that the atheistic idea, no less than the pantheistic or the theistic, lends itself to forceful poetic setting. We choose but three examples from among the many that occur to us. *Herminia's Prayer*, by Grant Allen, though atheistic, breathes the spirit which animated most of the conscientious objectors to military service in this and other lands :

A crowned Caprice is god of the world :
On his stony breast are his white wings furled,
No ear to hearken, no eye to see,
No heart to feel for a man hath he.

But his pitiless hands are swift to smite,
And his mute lips utter one word of might :
“ In the clash of gentler souls and rougher,
Wrong must thou do, or wrong must suffer.”

Then grant, O dumb, blind god, at least that we
Rather the sufferers than the doers be.

William Cory, in *Mimnermus in Church*, is less positive than Grant Allen. He writes questioningly :

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You promise heavens free from strife,
Pure faith, and perfect change of will ;
But sweet, sweet is this human life,
So sweet I fain would breathe it still :
Your chilly stars I can forego,
This warm, kind world is all I know.

You say there is no substance here,
One great reality above :
Back from that void I shrink in fear,
And child-like hide myself in love :
Show me what angels feel. Till then,
I cling, a mere weak man, to men.

You bid me lift my mean desires
From faltering lips and fitful veins
To sexless souls, ideal quires,
Unwearied voices, wordless strains :
My mind with fonder welcome owns
One dear dead friend's remembered tones.

Forsooth the present we must give
To that which cannot pass away ;
All beauteous things for which we live
By laws of time and space decay.
But oh, the very reason why
I clasp them, is because they die.

In Thomas Hardy we have the philosopher of wide sympathies, keen intellect, and remorseless logic, upon whom the atheistic outlook is forced by his experience, by his criticism of life. In his novels and in his

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shorter poems, Gloucester's thought in *King Lear*, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport," continually recurs. *The Dynasts* is an epic dealing with the Napoleonic adventure as the manifestation of an Immanent Will operating unconsciously. We have the same idea in *New Year's Eve*, of God "working evermore in his unweeeting way." Still harsher is the criticism in *His Education* :

I saw him steal the light away
That haunted in her eye :
It went so gently none could say
More than that it was there one day
And missing by-and-by.

I watched her longer, and he stole
Her lily tincts and rose ;
All her young sprightliness of soul
Next fell beneath his cold control,
And disappeared like those.

I asked : " Why do you serve her so,
Do you, for some glad day *
Hoard these her sweets ? " He said : " O no,
They charm not me ; I bid Time throw
Each promptly to decay."

Said I : " We call that cruelty—
We, your poor mortal kind."
He mused. " The thought is new to me.
Forsooth, though I men's master be
Theirs is the teaching mind ! "

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Some day, one who thoroughly sympathises with the atheistic outlook on life may compile "An Atheist Anthology" which would contain much of the most melodious and thoughtful verse ever penned; but, lest any reader should think that this "appreciation of poetry" is degenerating into something of the kind, we hasten to append as counterblast Francis Thompson's posthumous poem, *The Kingdom of God*, another of the unending variations (theistic, pantheistic, and atheistic) upon the theme of "infinite passion and the pain of finite hearts that yearn." Here we have a conjuncture of all the poetic appeals, to the sound-sense, to the visual imagination, and to the imaginative insight; here, too, we are enthralled by the humanity of the strains, the "droppings of warm tears," the "touches of things common till they rise to touch the spheres":

●
O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air—
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

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Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars !—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places ;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing !
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry ;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross. . .

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems ;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames !

Hitherto we have considered rhymed verse almost exclusively : but rhyme is by no means an essential part of the appeal to the sound-sense ; and many lovers of poetry, both writers and readers, find their inspiration warmer and their appreciation keener when they are relieved from its trammels. For examples of blank verse—verse which, as far as poetic form is concerned, trusts to rhythm and cadence—it might seem natural to quote Shakespeare, but the subject of Shakespeare is too vast for incidental treatment. For a

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specimen of blank verse we will turn to a poet nearer to our own time, to Shelley, who is usually classified as pre-eminent among English lyric poets: "lyric" meaning not simply that poems to which this term is applied are short and suitable for expression in song, but that the appeal to the sound-sense and to the emotional elements of imagination predominates. Most of Shelley's true intimates (and Shelley is still so vital a force that one may speak of the "intimates" of a man who has been dead nearly a century) will probably refuse to accept this estimate, for they think of Shelley as one whose appeal is made above all to the constructive intelligence, to the poetic imagination, to the mind of those who have conceived a new world which they are gropingly striving to realise on earth. "On earth there's nothing great but man, in man there's nothing great but mind." This idea of man as the master of things is the inspiration of Shelley's most mature philosophic work, *Prometheus Unbound*. But *Prometheus* is in rhymed verse, and for an example of Shelley's dexterous use of blank verse to convey profound critical thought we will turn to *Queen Mab*, written when the poet was barely twenty, and when his mind was in many respects immature.

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Assuredly, however, there is no immaturity either of form or content in the two following passages. The first is a variation upon the theme of Martha and Mary :

Those gilded flies
That, basking in the sunshine of a court,
Fatten on its corruption !—what are they ?
—The drones of the community ; they feed
On the mechanic's labour : the starved hind
For them compels the stubborn glebe to yield
Its unshared harvests ; and yon squalid form,
Leaner than fleshless misery, that wastes
A sunless life in the unwholesome mine,
Drags out in labour a protracted death,
To glut their grandeur ; many faint with toil,
That few may know the cares and woe of sloth.

The second, equally with the first, is the voice of the enthusiastic disciple of Godwin, and places Shelley in the line of anarchist thinkers, for it expresses the spirit of revolt against the abuses of power, a revolt which will never cease while tyranny endures :

The man
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys.
Power like a desolating pestilence
Pollutes whate'er it touches ; and obedience,
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of men, and of the human frame
A mechanized automaton.

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Matthew Arnold declared that Shelley was "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." Francis Thompson assures us that when "we peep over the wild mask of revolutionary metaphysics . . . we see the winsome face of the child." Shelley is a child at play. "The universe is his box of toys. . . . He is gold-dusty with tumbling among the stars. . . . He dances in and out of the gates of heaven; its floor is littered with his broken fancies." Fine-sounding images these: but Arnold's is radically false, for Shelley was anything but ineffectual either as man or poet; while Thompson concentrates upon a single aspect of Shelley's manifold activities, the aspect most congenial to a brother poet who was at once Catholic and mystic. Those desiring a more comprehensive judgment will find it in Salt's inestimable monograph, *Percy Bysshe Shelley, Poet and Pioneer*.

Before passing from the subject of blank verse, the reader would do well to compare the extracts from *Queen Mab* with the passage on page 30 from *The Ring and the Book*. When we consider Browning's work we feel, as so often in the case of this author, that the poetic form is a mere accident. The verse is rugged, almost uncouth, and can hardly be

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said to charm the ear. Most people read *The Ring and the Book* for the wealth of thought it contains, and would have read it with little less appreciation had it been written in prose. If the form of verse is needed, it is because the retelling of the same story a dozen times in plain prose would inevitably arouse mental fatigue, and perhaps evoke our sense of the ludicrous. The rhythm carries us forward much as the music of a band helps weary men to march. But Shelley's blank verse is so melodious, that the sound captivates us apart from the meaning it conveys. The meaning, moreover, appeals to the sympathies, to intuition, no less than to the intelligence.

From blank verse the natural transition is to free verse. In the beginning of this essay exception was taken to Edmund Gurney's phrase, "some vigorous abortion of Mr Walt Whitman's." Gurney had apparently no feeling for Whitman's charm; yet how potent is that charm to those whose ear and understanding are attuned to the symphonies of the American poet! He ignores two elements of the sound-appeal, rhyme and rhythm, trusting exclusively to cadence and assonance, in which he is one of the greatest of masters.

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Whitman's additional appeal is largely to the visual and auditory imagination, but also (and above all) to the imaginative intelligence. Whitman is in the succession of the great pantheists. At times he accepts all, and is content with all as it is :

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth and age than there is now ;
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. . . .

Clean and sweet is my Soul, and clean and sweet is all
that is not my Soul.

But at times he discriminates, recognising things more desirable and less desirable :

The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I
love,
The sickness of one of my folks, or of myself, or ill-doing,
or loss or lack of money, or depressions or exultations ;
Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubt-
fulness, the fitful events ;
These come to me nights and days, and go from me again,
But they are not the Me myself.

In fact our pantheist is inconsistent, as are all pantheists, all theists, and perhaps even atheists at times. Well, we know what Emerson said about consistency, "the hobgoblin of little minds" ; Maine, too, speaks

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of it as "a doubtful virtue"; and though we rightly prefer that quality in the scientific thinker, we are not likely to be censorious about the inconsistencies of the artist.

The next extract shows Whitman in a different mood, Whitman singing the evangel of liberty, defying the pestilence of power, the enforcement of obedience by death, the making of a desolation and calling it peace. It may be recommended alike to those who slay rebels and to those who are disheartened because rebels are slain :

Those corpses of young men,
Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets, those hearts
pierced by the grey lead,
Cold and motionless as they seem, live elsewhere with
unslaughtered vitality.
They live in other young men, O kings !
They live in brothers ready to defy you,
They were purified by death, they were taught and
exalted.
Not a grave of the murder'd for freedom but grows seed
for freedom, in its turn to bear seed,
Which the winds carry afar and resow, and the rains and
the snows nourish.
Not a disembodied spirit can the weapons of tyrants let
loose
But it stalks invisibly over the earth, whispering, coun-
selling, cautioning.
Liberty, let others despair of you—I never despair of
you.

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· In England, Edward Carpenter has made much use of the same poetic medium as Walt Whitman, and *Towards Democracy* is instinct with one of Whitman's leading thoughts—the kinship, the fellowship of all mankind. The great organism of humanity, like the individual man, is to Carpenter and Whitman “as clean round the bowels as round the head”; and Whitman goes so far as to take to his loving soul, specimens of our race which to the dispassionate eye of science may seem degenerate, debased, and fit only for the scrap-heap. It has been hinted upon a previous page that this generous impulse is perhaps extravagant, and that in moods of self-criticism its extravagance was recognised even by the American poet. But in truth Whitman and Carpenter, the democratically minded, mean little more than (to quit free verse for a moment) John Masfield means when he declares :

•
Not the ruler for me, but the ranker, the tramp of the road,
The slave with the sack on his shoulders pricked on with
the goad,
• The man with too weighty a burden, too weary a load.

The sailor, the stoker of steamers, the man with the clout,
The chantyman bent at the halliards putting a tune to
the shout,
The drowsy man at the wheel and the tired lookout.

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Others may sing of the wine and the wealth and the mirth,
The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth ;—
Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the
earth !

THEIRS be the music, the colour, the glory, the gold ;
Mine be a handful of ashes, a mouthful of mould.
Of the maimed, of the halt and the blind in the rain and
the cold—

Of these shall my songs be fashioned, my tales be told.

In America a brilliant school of younger poets is busily engaged in writing free verse. Many of them, like Carpenter (and, by anticipation, Whitman), are socialists, and their poetry is imbued with the socialistic criticism of life. Clement Wood, for instance, is a socialist, but he has finely voiced a mood of revolt against certain implications of the doctrine of human brotherhood. *A Meeting* may be read as a criticism of Whitman and Carpenter :

I saw him in the Subway, as we rode uptown ;
He sprawled alone on the seat across,
His head bent curiously on his neck, as if about to fall off.

His face it was that struck me most—
Eyes closed, beneath weak and matted eyebrows,
Skin blotched and spotted with brown patches,
A hollow horrible depression under each eye,

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A week's foul growth of beard,
Scarcely veiling the red scar of a burn twisting his
lips ;
And they hung open, showing two blackened teeth
within . . .
And from his lips a thin stream of saliva trickled.

As the car stopped and started, he sagged and lurched,
His head bent more ghastly on his neck. . . .
He may have been only a little lower than the angels ;
He was much lower than the beasts.
And this is a man, as I ;
Back of him, as back of me, the flowing generations of
humanity,
For him, as for me, mankind has slaved and struggled,
Clutched the dirt and conquered it, faced the stars and
unravell'd the riddle ;
Heroes, great loves, philosophies,
All poured forth for him as for me.

And this, O apostle of equality, you say is my
brother !
This, O walking delegate of brotherhood, is my comrade
and fellow !
I am to salute him, vermin and all, as such—
Together with him I am to build the future,
To found the kingdom of heaven upon earth. . . .

We fear that among our readers there may
be some who, like Edmund Gurney, cannot
endure free verse. Its critics are apt to
insist that it can be called verse only by
courtesy, and that but for the aid of the

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printer even its most ardent admirers would fail to recognise that it possesses metrical form. Max Eastman calls it "lazy verse." If the selections above given have not converted sceptics, there can be little hope of success, yet they will have to tolerate an exquisite intaglio from *The Masses*, written by Amy Lowell. She does not rejoice, as does Whitman, in things which most people find repulsive; but neither is she, like Clement Wood, utterly discouraged by their existence. The scrap-heap may be a necessity, and yet that necessity is but temporary. Mighty is the influence of social environment upon the plastic nature of man; and not until we have amended that environment to the full measure of the possible need we decide that the dustbin must, as certain eugenists contend, be tolerated as a permanent institution :

It is only a little twig
With a green bud at the end :
But if you plant it,
And water it,
And set it where the sun will be above it,
It will grow into a tall bush
With many flowers,
And leaves that thrust hither and thither
Sparkling.
From its roots will come freshness,

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- And beneath it the grass-blades
Will bend and recover themselves,
And clash one upon another
In the blowing wind.

But if you take my twig
And throw it into a closet
With mousetraps and blunted tools,
It will shrivel and waste.
And some day,
When you open the door,
You will think it an old twisted nail
And sweep it into the dustbin
- With other rubbish.

If touch be love's sense, poetry has, from early days in the world's history, been love's voice ; but the art of love poetry has, until our own epoch, been cultivated almost exclusively by the male—pre-eminently vocal in this respect like the male among birds. Sappho is a transcendent exception. In Roman literature, love poetry in the finer sense does not play a prominent part ; but with the dawn of the modern age, the field of vernacular verse is almost monopolised by the love lyrics of the troubadours in Provence and the minnesingers in Germany. We have an analogous outburst connected with the rise of modern English poetry in the love songs of Surrey and Wyatt—for the casual

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grossnesses of Chaucer, amusing though they be, have little to do with love in the civilised sense. A chasm, indeed, separates us from the love thought of the Elizabethans, even as it separates us from the artificialities and in-veracities of the days of chivalry (a mask for sexual no less than for economic exploitation). In the domain of contemporary love poetry, much of the finest work is by women, as, for example, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. But, as a thoroughly modern instance, let us consider first of all a man's love poem, *The Buds*, by James Stephens:

I can see
The buds have come again
On every tree.

Through some dear intercourse of sun and dew,
And thrilling root and folding earth, anew
They come in beauty.

They up to the sun,
As on a breast, are lifting every one
Their leaves.

Under the eaves
The sparrows are in hiding
Making love.

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- There is a chatter in the woods above,
Where the black crow
Is saying what his sweetheart wants to know.

The sun is shining fair,
And the green is on the tree,
And the wind goes everywhere
Whispering so secretly ;
You will die unless you do
Find a mate to whisper to.

If we have got beyond Chaucer's frank animalism, we have also, happily, got beyond the prudery of a very recent generation, and young people to-day find it hard to believe that Tennyson was reproved for indecency on account of the lines :

In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast :
In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest.

In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove :
In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

Our young folk, hardier and healthier, have been nourished on Kipling's prose poem, *The Spring Running*, which describes how in the springtime of his seventeenth year, when all

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the jungle was awakening to new life, Mowgli, the man cub, not yet understanding what was amiss, was soul-sick and body-sick with longing for his unmet mate. Here we have all the yearning, joy-tinted or sorrow-fraught, of love's anticipation. Poets have ever been apt to dwell upon love's mutability, upon its fugitive character, Swinburne, one of the sweetest of love poets, unhesitatingly asserting :

Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives,
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives.

The poet of to-day has a hardy faith in love, but is under no illusion about the tricks which time and chance play with it.

“ Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive ? ”

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now ;
No change, though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

.

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“ Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve ? ”

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep :
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

•
“ Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
• And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine ? ”

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose ;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

Thus writes A Shropshire Lad. The two opening stanzas are characteristic of this poet's work, for he rejoices in auditory images. Two other poems may be quoted finely illustrative in their different ways of all the elements of appreciation, and both exquisite embodiments of the love devoid of any trace of exploitation, the love which knows nothing of claims, which knows nothing of “ the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way,

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in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness." Consider first Alice Meynell's sonnet, *Renouncement* :

I must not think of thee ; and tired, yet strong,
I shun the love that lurks in all delight—
The love of thee—and in the blue heaven's height,
And in the dearest passage of a song.
Oh, just beyond the sweetest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits, hidden, yet bright ;
But it must never, never come in sight ;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.
But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,—
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.

Contrast with this the more vigorous strains of Emerson in *Give All to Love*. We do not term them more virile, for, though this poem was written by a man and the sonnet by a woman, there is nothing absolutely distinctive of the sex of the writer of either. The attitude of "renouncement" is more likely to be that of a woman than of a man, and Emerson's admonition to renounce if need be is addressed to a man ; but the highest art is untinged by sex, and the roles might well have been reversed :

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Leave all for love ;
Yet, hear me, yet,
One word more thy heart beloved,
One pulse more of firm endeavour,—
Keep thee to-day,
To-morrow, forever,
Free as an Arab
Of thy beloved.

Cling with life to the maid ;
But when the surprise,
First vague shadow of surmise
Flits across her bosom young,
Of a joy apart from thee,
Free be she, fancy-free ;
Nor thou detain her vesture's hem,
Nor the palest rose she flung
From her summer diadem.

Though thou love her as thyself,
As a self of purer clay,
Though her parting dims the day,
Stealing grace from all alive ;
Heartily know,
When half-gods go,
The gods arrive.

Free as an Arab, for the poet has always hated the thought of shackles. "How the light, light love, he has wings to fly at suspicion of a bond," mourns James Lee's wife. Blake expresses the same fancy in happier

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mood, but with the same visual metaphor of flight :

He who bends to himself a joy
Does the wingèd life destroy ;
But he who kisses a joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.

In the following lines by Stevenson we leave the field of pure love poetry, the poetry of sexual love. Stevenson's passion for his mate is intermingled with that love of wild nature, that joy in the open road, which was the most enduring sentiment of his life. And how rich are his verses in visual and auditory imagery !

I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.
I will make a palace fit for you and me,
Of green days in forests and blue days at sea.

I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep your room,
Where white flows the river, and bright blows the broom,
And you shall wash your linen and keep your body white
In rainfall at morning and dewfall at night.

And this shall be for music when no one else is near,
The fine song for singing, the rare song to hear !
That only I remember, that only you admire,
Of the broad road that stretches and the roadside fire.

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We have the like transition from sexual love to nature love in these stately stanzas by A. E. :

Lover, your heart, the heart on which it lies,
Your eyes that gaze, and those alluring eyes,
Your lips, the lips they kiss, alike had birth
Within this dark divinity of earth,
Within this mother being you despise.

•

Ah, when I think this earth on which I tread
Hath borne these blossoms of the lovely dead,
And makes the living heart I love to beat,
I look with sudden awe beneath my feet
As you with erring reverence overhead.

Is it not characteristic of the thought and feeling of our age that we have rediscovered nature? The modern poet, when not under the immediate stress of love passion, delights to revolt against the cramping artificialities of city life, to hymn a pæan in praise of wild nature. In *The Road*, James Stephens makes a lyrical appeal of rare splendour :

Because our lives are cowardly and sly,
Because we do not dare to take or give,
Because we scowl and pass each other by,
We do not live, we do not dare to live.

.

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Let us go out and walk upon the road,
And quit for evermore the brick-built den,
The lock and key, the hidden, shy abode
That separates us from our fellow men.

And by contagion of the sun we may
Catch at a spark from that primeval fire,
And learn that we are better than our clay,
And equal to the peaks of our desire.

Often, however, nature imagery is used by the poet to express, not the fervour of youthful hope, but the disillusionment of middle life. A friend wrote the other day: "Am just home from my week-end's hot gospelling for the new era—alas! it is ever coming and to come! Maybe, after all, 'tis but a metaphysical carrot suspended before our foolish minds to urge us the better to trudge on with our master's burdens—a blasphemous thought." The metaphysical carrot is plain though expressive prose. The mood is one we all know in moments of fatigue and depression. The carrot is good, but better still is J. K. Stephen's *Blue Hills—An Allegory*:

Years ago, in the land of my birth,
When my head was little above the earth,
I stood by the side of the grass blades tall,
And a quickset hedge was a mighty wall,

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And a measureless forest I often found
In a swampy acre of rush-clad ground :
But, when I could see it, the best of the view
Was a distant circle, the Hills of Blue.

Well I've reached them at last, those distant Hills ;
I've reached their base through a world of ills ;
I have toiled and laboured and wandered far,
With my constant eyes on a shifting star :
And ever, as nearer I came, they grew
Larger and larger, but, ah ! less blue.

Green I have found them, green and brown,
Studded with houses, o'erhanging a town,
Feeding the plain below with streams,
Dappled with shadows and brightening with beams,
Image of scenes I had left behind,
Merely a group of the hilly kind :
And beyond them a prospect as fair to view
As the old, and bounded by Hills as blue.

A. E. Housman uses the same image, though
his vision is one of regretful retrospect :

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows :
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those ?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

58 THE APPRECIATION OF POETRY

If our depression find vent in anger and impatience because the Hills of Blue are unattainable, because the new era we are labouring to construct seems hopelessly elusive, we are apt to exclaim with Fitzgerald-Omar :

Ah Love ! could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire?

But this is the impatience of the physical-force anarchist. When our minds are unclouded, when we shake off transient moods, when the red wine of life courses healthily through our veins, we rejoice without alloy in the forecast of *Prometheus Unbound* :

And our singing shall build
In the void's loose field
A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield ;
We will take our plan
From the new world of man, *
. And our work shall be called the Promethean.

In the concluding sentences of *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley enshrines the same thought in glorious prose : " Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts

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upon the present, the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Yet it is not with the conception of the poet as law-giver, as maker of rules, that we wish to bring this study to a close. The poet's supreme task is to enrich life and to adorn it, not for the present merely, but for the future. If the poet comprises and unites the characters of legislator and of seer, it is as seer, above all, that we love to contemplate him. "For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germ of the flower and the fruit of latest time. . . ."

Ambushed in Winter's heart the rose of June is furled.

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